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SUBJECT: Two New Labor NGOs - Different Missions, Different
Government Reaction

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11. (SBU) Summary and comment: How much room do labor non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have to operate in the Pearl River Delta (PRD)? The different experiences of two new organizations show that it depends on the group's mission. The Green Grass Workers Service Department is trying to expose poor working conditions in local factories. It has not been able to register as an NGO and has faced government interference. The Zhuhai Center for Social Work Facilitators, on the other hand, has less confrontational goals -- helping migrant workers adjust to living and working far from home. The Zhuhai Center is fully registered and enjoys a cooperative relationship with the government-controlled labor union. Green Grass's experience sheds some light on the limits of the Chinese government's tolerance of labor NGO activities. However, the fact that it is allowed to operate at all is perhaps a step forward. End summary and comment.

Different Missions -----

12. (SBU) Two new labor NGOs have recently opened shop in the PRD with very different missions. The Green Grass Workers Service Department was founded in April 2008 as the Shenzhen office of New York-based China Labor Watch. It focuses on reporting on working conditions in PRD factories and on the treatment workers. According to Yang Min, one of Green Grass's employees, it often cooperates with international brand name companies like Adidas and Nike to perform undercover investigations of their suppliers. Yang Min told us that after its reports are released, factory owners often take corrective measures to improve working conditions.

13. (SBU) Meanwhile, across the Pearl River in Zhuhai, the Zhuhai Center for Social Work Facilitators opened its doors in December 12008. The Zhuhai Center is a branch of The Culture and Communication Center for Facilitators, a Beijing-based NGO. Its mission is to help local migrant workers improve their quality of life and adjust to the challenges of living far away from home. According to the center's director, Yang Daimao, the events it has organized include a photo exhibit showing the life and work of migrant laborers, a play about the challenges they face and a debate on how to improve their living and working conditions. The center also offers language training in English and Cantonese and some counseling services.

Different Treatment

¶4. (SBU) Government reaction to the two new NGOs has been dramatically different. Green Grass's Yang Min told us that the authorities have kept a close eye on her organization since it began operations in Shenzhen, pointing out that foreign-funded NGOs are usually subject to closer scrutiny. She said that the government had intervened twice in projects that Green Grass was working on, asking the organization to suspend operations in one case. Green Grass has been unsuccessful in its attempt to register with the Civil Affairs Bureau as an NGO and instead had to register as a private enterprise with the Administration of Industry and Commerce.

¶5. (SBU) The Zhuhai Center, in contrast, has a very cooperative relationship with the government. It has successfully registered as an NGO with the Zhuhai Civil Affairs Bureau. It works closely with the government-controlled labor union at Flextronics Corporation, the largest local employer. A representative of the Flextronics union participated in econoff's visit to the center's office. Flextronics funds most of the center's operation, and most of the center's clients are Flextronics employees.

Different Challenges

¶6. (SBU) Green Grass's Yang Min identified child labor in the PRD as a top concern of the organization. She noted that child labor in most local factories is voluntary and the underage employees use false or borrowed identification documents to get their jobs. She said parents often support the efforts of their children to work in the factories. In addition, Yang Min expressed concern that the

global economic downturn was increasing the government's tendency rule in favor of factory owners in labor disputes with migrant workers.

¶7. (SBU) At the Zhuhai Center, Yang Daimao said the organization's main concern was attracting more volunteers to work at the center. The center has a staff of five paid employees and about 40 volunteers. She said that only about half of the volunteers fall in to a group of "core volunteers" who are active in most of the center's programs. Yang Daimao explained that attracting more active participation from workers would be essential to achieving the center's goals for improving the lives of migrant laborers.

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